

5	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
TennesseeBroadsheet Master Template_ Revised 11/01/00					TennesseeBroadsheet Master Template_ Revised 11/01/00					
5	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	5
TennesseeBroadsheet Master Template_ Revised 11/01/00					TennesseeBroadsheet Master Template_ Revised 11/01/00					
100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	10	5

Remembering Cash

“I guess I’ll try to numbly get through the day as I start trying to adjust to the total alien concept of a world without Johnny Cash in it. I take comfort in knowing that millions are facing the same thing.”

— **Andy McLenon, Cash fan and Nashville resident**

❖ ❖ ❖

“Country music has never had a more powerful personality than Johnny Cash. So much can be said about this incredible man. Rock, country and gospel will be fighting to claim his music as their own — and, in the end, they all get to.”

— **Brad Paisley**

❖ ❖ ❖

“It’s like he was rushing home to June.”

— **Gerry House, veteran WSIX radio personality**

❖ ❖ ❖

“His influence spread over many generations of different people. I loved him as singer and a writer. I remember years ago a big part of our repertoire were two of my favorite Johnny Cash songs, *I Walk The Line* and *Ballad Of A Teenage Queen*.”

— **Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones**

❖ ❖ ❖

“Johnny Cash was a music legend and American icon whose career spanned decades and genres. His resonant voice and human compassion reached the hearts and souls of generations, and he will be missed.”

— **President George Bush**

❖ ❖ ❖

“We both went through a lot of messes in the old days but ended up realizing what was important in life and changed our ways. I know that the angels will sing today and heaven is a better place with the addition of Johnny Cash. ”

— **George Jones**

❖ ❖ ❖

“Johnny Cash has only passed into the greater light. He will never, ever die. He will only become more important in this industry as time goes by.”

— **Dolly Parton**

The Multifaceted Man in Black

Through success and excess, Johnny Cash made music that blurred boundaries and soothed souls

Somehow, Johnny Cash is dead. Battling ill health for years and without his longtime companion since wife June Carter Cash's death in May, Mr. Cash's frailties of body and heart made him seem no less indomitable. Fans and fellow musicians likened him to a force of nature: an iconic, elemental figure, more granite and fire than flesh and blood.

By **PETER COOPER**
Staff Writer

But Friday morning around 2 a.m., Mr. Cash passed away at Baptist Hospital, succumbing to respiratory failure brought on by complications from diabetes. He was 71 years old, and his life altered the course of American popular music.

“No body of work comes close to what

his particular body of work is,” said Emmylou Harris, whom Mr. Cash called his favorite female singer.

Speaking at a 1999 tribute concert, rock star Bruce Springsteen asserted that Mr. Cash, “took the social consciousness of folk music, the gravity and humor of country music and the rebellion of rock ‘n’ roll and told all us young guys that not only was it all right to tear up all those lines and boundaries, but it was important.”

Mr. Cash was a 1950s rockabilly who fused country and folk music in the ‘60s and made stark country albums with rock ‘n’ roll flourishes at the end of his career. He was an admittedly flawed man who battled drug addiction yet emerged as a high-profile Christian. He was a social activist who remained beloved by the

right-leaning, country traditionalist set.

He was a 1980s industry washout — considered too old-fashioned for the country charts — who signed with Rick Rubin’s American Recording Company in the 1990s and experienced an unprecedented career resurgence, winning Grammys and filling hip California venues such as The Viper Room and the House of Blues. He was a Country Music Hall of Famer and a Rock and Roll Hall of Famer.

He was easy to appreciate and often hard to figure. Longtime friend Kris Kristofferson came closest to the latter in a 1971 song called *The Pilgrim, Chapter 33*:

“He’s a poet, he’s a picker/ He’s a prophet, he’s a pusher/ He’s a pilgrim and a preacher, and a problem when he’s stoned/ He’s a walking contradiction,

partly truth and partly fiction/ Taking every wrong direction on his lonely way back home.”

Mr. Cash confounded expectations at every turn, delighting listeners with his staggering rumble of a voice even as he confounded radio programmers and industry gate-keepers. His 14 No. 1 country hits — *I Walk the Line* and *Ring of Fire*, among them — don’t approach marks made by Merle Haggard, George Strait, Conway Twitty and others. But his artistic and personal legacies go far beyond chart positions or records sold.

“I wonder if I ever really did leave, how many would there be to grieve? How they’d react to the word,” Mr. Cash once wrote and sang.

The answers now return: Thousands, and with considerable sorrow. ❖



COURTESY OF COUNTRY MUSIC HALL OF FAME AND MUSEUM
J.R. Cash, as a boy in Arkansas.

Chapter 1: A hardscrabble youth

Kingsland, Ark., is a tiny little town now chiefly known as “Birth-place of Johnny Cash.” When Mr. Cash was born there — on Feb. 26, 1932 — no one called him “Johnny.” To his parents, and on his birth certificate, he was J.R. Cash, as no one could agree on a name at first.

In 1935 father Ray Cash moved his family to a five-room house near Dyess, Ark., to take part in a rehabilitation project run by the Roosevelt administration.

“Actually, it was a socialistic setup with a co-op store and a co-op cotton gin, the intention being that the farmers would share any profits from the gin and the store,” Mr. Cash wrote in his first autobiography, *Man In Black*.

The share-cropping family sang country songs while picking cotton, and work in the fields was not halted even by death. Mr. Cash’s older brother, Jack, was killed in a table-saw accident in 1944, an event that haunted Mr. Cash. But the next day, the family was back chopping cotton. Mother Carrie Cash fell to her knees in the field that morning, as her son related in a second autobiography, *Cash: The Autobiography*. “Lest you get too romantic an impression of the good, natural, hard-working, character-building country life back then, back there, remember that picture of Carrie Cash down in the mud between the cotton rows on any mother’s worst day,” he wrote.

Carrie Cash saw musical promise in J.R., the fourth of five children. She saved enough money for the teen to take a few singing lessons.

Though J.R. loved the gospel music he heard at the Pentecostal Church of God in Dyess, he was most smitten with the *Grand Ole Opry* and the country music he heard on the radio.

A brief encounter with Charlie Louvin of the Louvin Brothers before a concert in Dyess further enraptured the teen: “I didn’t even feel the gravel on my bare feet that night when I walked the two-and-a-half miles home in the dark, singing all the songs I’d heard from the stage at the school auditorium,” he wrote in *Man In Black*.



COURTESY OF MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES
The “Million Dollar Quartet” session at Sun Records featured, from left to right, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, Elvis Presley and Johnny Cash.

Chapter 2: From service to Sun

Though it was music that thrilled Mr. Cash, it seemed incapable of removing him from Arkansas. Upon graduation from Dyess High School in 1950, he moved to Michigan, intending to work in an automobile plant. Making car hoods on an assembly line didn’t suit him much better than cotton farming, so he joined the Air Force. The military refused to accept “J.R.” as a first name, and he became “John R. Cash.”

During basic training in Texas, he met a high school senior named Vivian Liberto. His assignment to a base in Landsberg, Germany (he was a radio intercept operator charged with cracking Russian code transmissions) did not deter their burgeoning romance. While in the service, he began strumming a guitar, composing music and verse and playing in a country band.

His time in the Air Force was of great musical significance, as it was there that he learned some guitar chords and saw a film called *Inside Folsom Prison* that spurred his now-famous song, *Folsom Prison Blues*. In the service, he also was struck by an intriguing drawling sound that occurred when his reel-to-reel tape machine was improperly loaded. An attempt to replicate that sound, coupled with his feelings of fidelity toward Vivian Liberto, was the genesis of another classic song, *I Walk The Line*.

Upon his 1954 discharge, Mr. Cash moved to Memphis, married Liberto, worked as a door-



PHOTO BY COLUMBIA / LEGACY
Marshall Grant, at left with bass, and Luther Perkins, right with electric guitar, backed Johnny Cash as the Tennessee Two.

to-door appliance salesman, enrolled at the Keegan School of Broadcasting and put together an upstart country group to help him become a gospel singer. He set his sights on Sun Records, a Memphis operation that was seeing success with a new artist named Elvis Presley.

“Sun Records was between my house and the broadcasting school,” Mr. Cash told journalist Peter Guralnick. Mr. Cash visited the studio often, hoping for an audition with Sun owner/producer Sam Phillips.

After being repeatedly told that Phillips was unavailable, Mr. Cash happened once to be sitting outside Sun as Phillips came to work. He forced his way into an audition, and Phillips was duly impressed.

“I don’t feel like anyone discovered me because I had to

fight so hard to get heard,” Mr. Cash told Guralnick.

A rock ‘n’ roll pioneer whose records with Elvis Presley were making pop inroads, Phillips had no use for a gospel artist. He asked Mr. Cash to write or find some secular material. The hopeful artist went back to the studio with his Tennessee Two (guitarist Luther Perkins and bass man Marshall Grant) with homesick train song *Hey Porter!* and *Folsom Prison Blues*, a song that borrowed liberally from Gordon Jenkins’ *Crescent City Blues* recording.

Not yet convinced that the man he called Johnny Cash had composed a hit, Phillips charged Mr. Cash to write “an uptempo weeper love song,” and he filled the order with *Cry! Cry! Cry!*, which would be paired with *Hey Porter!* as Mr. Cash’s first single.

Released in 1955, *Cry! Cry! Cry!* was a pop and country hit that ultimately peaked at No. 14 on *Billboard*’s country music charts.

“Musicians scoffed, but Cash and the Tennessee Two possessed the quality that had been lacking in country music since Hank Williams died: originality,” wrote Colin Escott and Martin Hawkins in *Good Rockin’ Tonight: Sun Records and the Birth of Rock ‘n’ Roll*.

Mr. Cash was among a group of Sun rockabillys including Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis, but he and his Tennessee Two had a propulsive yet distinctly Southern “boom-chicka-boom” sound that set them apart. Mr. Cash sometimes compensated for the lack of a drummer by threading wax paper through guitar strings, and Luther Perkins’ spare elec-



1930s

Feb. 26, 1932: J.R. Cash is born to father Ray Cash and mother Carrie Rivers Cash, in Kingsland, Ark.

1935: Ray Cash moves his family to

Dyess, Ark., to participate in a Roosevelt administration farming program.

1940s

1942: Mother Carrie buys J.R. a guitar for his 10th

birthday.

1944: Older brother Jack is killed in a farm accident. The family is back at work the next day in the cotton fields. On Jack’s tombstone is written “Meet Me

In Heaven,” words that would appear later as the title to one of Johnny Cash’s songs.

1950s

1950: Graduates Dyess High school,

moves briefly to Michigan, then joins the Air Force.

1954: Honorably discharged from Air Force. Marries the former Vivian Liberto. Forms a band with guitarist Luther Perkins and bass

player Marshall Grant.

1955: Becomes a Sun recording artist with the release of *Hey Porter!* and *Cry! Cry! Cry!* Daughter Rosanne, who would become a

music star in her own right, is born.

1956: Lands a regular spot on the *Louisiana Hayride* show in January, then begins performing on the *Grand Ole Opry* in July. *I Walk The*

Line reaches the Top 20 on the pop charts. Daughter Kathleen “Kathy” is born.

1957: First album, *With His Hot and Blue Guitar*, is released on Sun.

1958: Leaves Sun and signs with Columbia Records.

1957: Daughter Cindy is born.

(Continued on next page)